

A JOHNSONIAN NEWS LETTER

Vol. IV, No. 2

Edited by James L. Clifford
Lehigh University, Bethlehem, Pa.

May, 1944

1744-1944

In May, 1744, Alexander Pope breathed his last; in May, 1944, two hundred years later, we do him honor. And certainly it is no anomaly for a Johnsonian News Letter to devote itself to celebrating a writer whom Johnson himself so admired. "Why, sir," Johnson might have exclaimed, "the idea is a good one -- and there's an end on't. If Pope be not a poet worth remembering, where may a better be found."

-oOo-

GROUP VII PROGRAM

For 1944, the officers of Group VII of the MLA, the first half of the 18th century, are: Chairman -- Hoxie N. Fairchild (Hunter); Secretary -- J. M. Osborn (Yale).

They have arranged the following program to be presented at the first general meeting -- whenever that may be:

- (1) "Dryden's Argument against Deism in Religio Laici," Richard H. Perkinson (Fordham).
- (2) "Bayle and Berkeley," Pierre Courtines (Queens College).
- (3) "The Philosophical Background of the Essay on Man," Maynard Mack (Yale).

These will be followed by an open discussion and reports of committees etc.

-oOo-

A THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

For some time your editor has been mulling over a comment made by Louis Landa (Chicago) when reviewing Hoxie Fairchild's last volume on Religious Poetry in the Annual Bibliography for 1943. After raising the question of "the extent to

which literary history is admissible when it bears strongly the impress of personal predilections," Landa incidentally introduces the speculation as to how acceptable would be "a literary history of the nineteenth century in which the underlying presumption is the general superiority of eighteenth-century poetry and in which particular poems of the nineteenth century are judged by criteria prevailing in the eighteenth century, being estimated as significant or valuable insofar as they point back to the earlier period or as they represent an approximation to or a decline from its generally superior characteristics."

Have you ever thought seriously of the possibility of such an attempt? Remember that practically all modern histories of literature and college anthologies are written with the tacit understanding that Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats are far superior as pure poets to Dryden and Pope.

Every author and anthologist appears to start with such a personal predilection, which colors all his work. And most of us, with the same temperamental inclinations, accept this attitude without question. In fact, we doubt if many high school and college teachers of English have ever seriously doubted the validity of their approach.

But what if we were to start with another "frame of reference", as might the twentieth century mathematician, what would be the result? It is easy to imagine the howls of anger and derision from the vested interests of the romanticists. And picture the surprise of unsuspecting students inculcated with persuasive neo-classic doctrine in a sophomore text. Or is such a speculation too far-fetched even for 1944? What about it?

Here is a quiz, graciously sent on by Flora Marie Handley (S. M. U.), to test your knowledge of Pope's verses. The following lines refer to his friends or enemies. Allowing five points for the name of the person and five more for the name of the poem in which the lines are found, a score of 60 is par, 70 very good, and 80 or better excellent. Blanks within a quotation indicate that the name of the person is omitted. (For the answers see the last page)

1. Such late was _____--the Muse's judge and friend,
Who justly knew to blame or to commend.
2. 'Twere well might critics still this freedom take,
But _____ reddens at each word you speak.
3. The gen'rous God
Kept dress for Duchesses, the world shall know it,
To you gave Sense, Good-humour, and a Poet.
4. Of Manners gentle, of Affections mild;
In Wit a Man; Simplicity, a child.
5. Yet then did _____ draw his venal quill;
I wish'd the man a dinner, and sat still.
6. Then gnaw'd his pen, then dash'd it on the ground,
Sinking from thought to thought, a vast profound!
7. Let humble _____, with an awkward shame,
Do good by stealth, and blush to find it fame.
8. Whether thou choose Cervantes' serious air,
Or laugh and shake in Rab'lais' easy chair,
Or praise the Court, or magnify Mankind,
Or thy griev'd country's copper chains unbind.
9. Obscene with filth the miscreant lies bewray'd,
Fall'n in the plash his wickedness had laid.
10. Damn with faint praise, assent with civil leer,
And without sneering, teach the rest to sneer.

A POTPOURRI OF RECENT ARTICLES

As might be expected, there has been a surge of articles about Pope in the scholarly journals. At the risk of leaving out some more important than those he includes, your editor ventures to list a number by our own members. Recently he has enjoyed: "R. W. Babcock's "Pope's Grotto Today" in July '43 SA Quarterly; Maynard Mack's "Pope's Horatian Poems" in MP for Aug. '43; Cleanth Brooks' "The Case of Miss Arabella Fermor: a Re-examination" in the Oct. '43 Sewanee Review; J.E. Tobin's "Alexander Pope, 1744-

1744 -- Personality and Reputation" in Thought for March '44; Hoyt Trowbridge's "Pope, Gay, and The Shepherd's Week" in the March MLQ; and in the same issue "Donald F. Bond's "Pope's Contributions to the Spectator", which is an outgrowth of his larger work on the Spectator Papers.

An interesting article which may perhaps be missed because of the periodical in which it appeared is Finley Foster's "Bath: Physicians and Literature" in the January Bulletin of the Medical Library Ass'n.

POPE WORK IN PROGRESS

George Sherburn (Harvard) writes that he has recently been made happy by the receipt of transcripts of forty-odd unpublished and hitherto unknown letters from Pope to the Earl of Burlington. This makes a total of over sixty letters from Pope to the Earl or Countess of Burlington that seem never to have been printed.

He adds: "The letters illuminate various obscure passages in Pope's career, and indicate a considerable intimacy between the poet and Lord Burlington and his Countess. One letter shows that Pope sent to Burlington the Epistle on Taste for his lordship's approval eight months before it was published, and thus makes it certain that Burlington did approve the poem before it was published."

R. H. Griffith writes: "At the University of Texas we shall make the 1944 volume of our Studies in English a memorial to Pope and his contemporaries. In May or later we shall put many Pope things on display in the Library's exhibition room...."

He adds that "before the war came on us" he had planned to get many of the great libraries of the country to make a special exhibit of books, Ms., and pictures; he even admits allowing his fancy to ruminate on getting a movie company to do a little picture of the Rape of the Lock. But alas for such Pre-Pearl Harbor plans!

His own immediate project is the "long ago promised, still uncompleted bibliography of the Pope 'Quarrel Literature.'" This long and laborious task gradually goes forward, but when it will finally appear cannot be predicted now.

Griffith ends his letter with some valuable advice. "There is much Pope work still to be done. The Twickenham edition, in process, will be a help -- it should not be assumed to be an end; Mr. Sherburn's Letters of Pope will be a help. When we have used our battery of methods and tools to establish

what Pope said and the circumstances under which he said it, we shall then need to enquire, in a beyond-graduate-school level, what was the significance of it."

Maynard Mack (Yale) confesses that work on his edition of the Essay on Man came to an abrupt halt last July when the army and navy descended on Yale. Hordes of A.S.T., V-12, and Pre-med. students do not leave much time for research.

The state of the edition, when he was forced to leave it, is this: the text and textual apparatus are in final form; the materials for annotation are all assembled, ready for final selection; over half of the long introduction is in first draft.

Of his introduction, Mack adds: "Historically, I have tried to 'place' the Essay in the wide landscape of Western thought, as well as in the local intellectual environment of its age. When one does this, one corrects the myopia of many of the poem's commentators. Critically, on the other hand, I have tried to show what I think the poem is really about, what it says. This requires a closer inspection than it is normally accorded, and while I don't think I have all the answers perhaps, I think I can show how it is a unified and powerful piece.

"Critics are too prone to forget that the Essay is a poem -- one, to be sure, which uses philosophical materials, but whose full scope and meaning is not merely identical with these. Philosophical positions are only its dramatis personae: it is their manipulation within the total context that makes the play. In any case, either the Essay will emerge as a more exciting piece of poetry than most people supposed, or its editor as an even bigger fool."

Mack reports several other Pope projects at Yale -- a dissertation on Pope's Shakespeare last year, and another on the Homer now in progress. Mack concludes: "My own next work, if I can ever climb out from under the edition, will be a

critical account of Pope's poetry, as free as possible from the textbook tradition which makes the teaching of 18th century poetry such uphill work for all of us. I find, and I dare say you have, that it takes two-thirds of a year in class to overcome the effects of such mouldy substitutes for thought as 'cold,' 'correct,' 'elegant,' and 'artificial' -- I could extend the list forever."

J.E. Tobin (Fordham) continues with his reestimate of Pope -- published in Thought.

Hoyt Trowbridge (Oregon) plans a "fresh, critical evaluation of Pope's Pastorals," but admits that when it will be written, he can't say -- "but I'm afraid it won't be soon."

Paul F. Leedy (Bowling Green St.) writes: "At present I am working on an article on some aspects of criticism of Pope from the time of his death in 1744 to the appearance of Warton's first volume in 1756. I think that I have something significant to bring out regarding this phase of Pope criticism....

"As soon as the first article is out of the way I propose to get out another having to do with one phase of Pope's influence upon conventional poetic taste in the latter part of the eighteenth century....

"My third and big project is a monograph on the overthrow of Pope's reputation as poet during the first half of the nineteenth century. The bulk of this material is ready for revision, and I like to think that I can have the study finished by sometime in 1945."

Agnes Sibley (Lindenwood College) describes what she is doing as a "study of Pope's reputation in America up to about 1850. In the 18th and early 19th centuries (I have

not as yet done much on the period beyond that time) Pope was much admired in this country as a writer of 'pathetick' verse and as a great moralist. Extracts from his poetry were used rather extensively in school readers and books of elocution.

"One of the most interesting aspects of the work is collecting data on American editions of his poetry. The Essay on Man was the poem most frequently reprinted, and I have a record of over a hundred different editions of it, most of them small paper-backed pamphlets of 16mo size or less. I think it likely that some of these tiny books have escaped the collections in the American Antiquarian Society Library and other libraries; if any of the readers of the JNL knows of privately owned American editions of the Essay on Man (or of other Pope works) I should greatly appreciate hearing from him.

"I should be much interested, also, in old family records such as letters or diaries which might mention reading Pope or studying his poems in the schools."

Austin Wright (Carnegie Tech.) lets us know that he has a manuscript of a book on Spence practically ready for publication.

Dixon Wecter writes that there is no major Pope research going forward at the Huntington Library. "Since earlier heydays when Root and Sherburn worked here, Twickenham and its shades have collected a sad amount of dust."

R. D. Havens adds a similar note from Johns Hopkins: "There is no research connected with Pope and his circle being carried on here, unless you include Melvin Watson's dissertation, The Essay Tradition and the Magazine Serials (1731-1820)"

What would a Pope number be without some heroic couplets? Properly to celebrate the occasion, Dick Altick, fresh from teaching mathematics, as well as English, to V-12 students at F. & M., has tossed off the following verses. Read them out loud with appropriate gestures, if you want to catch the proper spirit.

PROLEGOMENA TO THE ACADEMIAD

The muse on high the warring globe surveys,
And scenes of horror meet her troubled gaze.
Her crystal orbs grow moist as they behold
Her sons evicted from the realms of gold:
Sad exiles from a life of cloister'd ease,
Once gods of letters -- English Ph. D.'s:
War's hapless prey, their misery unalloy'd,
Apostates some, the others unemploy'd.

To zones of battle roam her startled eyes,
Which dwell upon some scholarly G.I.'s:
One reads Boswell as he navigates a tank,
Another wishes Sterne had writ for Yank;
A jungle fighter, as he stalks his prey,
Still yearns to write the standard book on Gray.
In duffel bag an errant gob includes
A set of Burney -- but no Vargas nudes.

On stricken schools the muse's gaze now falls,
Where lonely coeds moon about the halls;
The Army gone, the twilight of the gods
Hangs brooding o'er th' evacuated quads.
'Lone in their dens professors sit and think,
And all the while their starved waistlines shrink;
On fickle gen'ral's falls their daily curse:
A.S.T.P. was bad, but leisure's worse!

To busier plains the muse's glance doth shift,
Where once fond classes read in Pope and Swift;
Where scholars prayed at Fielding's honest shrine,
And peacefully declaimed old Young's harmonious line.
Walpole and Collins doze on lib'ry shelves,
Neglected, while their vot'ries teach V-twelves!
These men, their ign'rance for the nonce concealed,
Have valiantly "refreshed" in another field;
One, thinking wistfully of his work on Crabbe,
The wrong switch pulls, and wrecks the physics lab;
Another, deep in dreams of Hannah More,
Assures his class that one and two make four.

This horrid plight of sons she holds so dear
Draws from the sorrowing muse a bitter tear;
"Who's left to write another Goldsmith note,
T' expose at least one more unnoticed quote?
Who still has courage in his war-torn heart
To do that dream'd-of book on Garrick's art?
Who now with erudition deep will sway
Forlorn rump sessions of the M.L.A.?"
Her arms wide ope to the shattered world she flings,
And stirring words from her fair lips take wings:
O'er Academe's ravaged cities fast they fly,
Where iv'ry towers in stark ruin lie:

"Thy wanton slaughter by this brutal age
Inscrib'd must be on hist'ry's deathless page;
Survey thy ranks, O learned, wretched man,
For him who still commands a fearless pen:
A pen that will with epic genius trace
The doom of yet another luckless race!
Bring forth a modern Gibbon, to recall,
For future ages, thy decline and fall!"

-oOo-

It is fitting, too, that we have some verses connecting Pope and Dr. Johnson; and these J.R. Moore of Indiana has kindly provided. If you are eager for a stimulating detective search, discover if you can where every detail in the lines may be found in Johnson's works. Moore insists he can give footnotes to verify every one.

ALEXANDER POPE

Two Hundred Years After

(Spoken by the Shade of Dr. Johnson)

As observation, with extensive view
Of world in arms from China to Peru,
Turns nearer home, and sees the honored dead
Twice buried by the walls from overhead,
Old haunts forsaken, the familiar room
Unroofed to blackout's inspissated gloom,
Old shrines unhallowed, the lost tombs of thanes
Interred in ruins of St. Clement Danes,
How shall men honor now the sable hearse
Of him who ruled as sovereign lord of verse?
Or how recall the peaceful time, when once
It would have been worth while to be a dunce?
How honor (amid plans for all mankind)
The politics of cabbages, or find
Praise for the nightingale while nations shout?
("Jupiter only smiles, the other Gods laugh out.")

Lord of the melody of verse, perhaps
Unrivalled till a thousand years elapse!
New sentiments, new images may spring,
New dances (but no wit to make them sting),
New verses, written without tail or head,
New clubs, where female poets talk you dead;
But in the Hall of Fame where'er they meet
Homer assigns to Pope no humble seat.

-oOo-

To fill this space, we can't resist cribbing an English wit's parody of Pope's famous lines:

Pope springs eternal in the human breast,
What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed.

QUERIES

C. R. Tracy (Univ. of Alberta), who has for some time been working on Richard Savage, writes: "The intimacy between Pope and Savage was apparently long and intimate, and of course there is a great deal about it in the Pope correspondence and in other well known sources. But still there are many facts which remain obscure, and so I would be very glad of any hints about evidence bearing on the problem which may have turned up in less obvious sources."

"In particular I can't remember having ever seen a list of the contributors to the fund which Pope apparently collected for Savage's use in Wales -- one suspects that Pope himself may also have been the chief subscriber -- but surely somewhere the others may have let their left hands know."

"Since I am writing on the subject of Savage I have another query which, though having nothing to do with Pope, you might like to put in sometime. The only acknowledged poem of Savage's for which I cannot find a text is his Volunteer Laureate No. 3, for 1734. It was published in March 1734, and was still being advertised for sale in March 1735, but it is not listed in the Union Catalogs, or in the British Museum, the Bodleian or the Library of the University of Cambridge. If anybody can put his hands on either a copy of the original edition or a reprinting of the text in some newspaper or journal of the day, I should be very highly indebted to him. Incidentally, the Volunteer Laureate No. 3 in Johnson's Poets and, I think, all later collected editions is really No. 4, and begins 'In youth no parent nursed my infant songs.' Johnson concealed the gap in his collection by renumbering the poem."

T. C. Duncan Eaves (Lowell House, Harvard) is doing research on 18th century book illustrations -- not only plates in editions, but also paintings, drawings, prints etc.

He would be much pleased to hear of any unusual illustrations which our readers may know about. Also there are two paintings which he has been trying in vain to discover: -- Joseph Highmore's "portrait of Clarissa at whole length, in the Vandyke taste and dress" (painted 1745-47, and mentioned by Richardson in a letter to Lady Bradshaigh, and the same artist's "whole length of a lady in the character of Clementina in Sir Charles Grandison" (exhibited at the Society of Artists in 1761 and owned in 1780 by Anthony Highmore).

Harlan W. Hamilton (Univ. of Akron) is anxious to find more of the letters and manuscripts of William Combe, author of Dr. Syntax. He adds: "Such materials are fairly common in libraries and private collections, and I should be glad to hear of any which are known to your subscribers."

Everyone, we know, will be delighted to hear that the first volume of the L.S.U. edition of the Correspondence of Bishop Percy will be issued soon. First comes the Percy-Malone letters - the next volume to be the Farmer-Percy correspondence.

Cleanth Brooks, the American editor, will welcome information about any Percy letters hidden in out of the way spots.

-oOo-

MEMBERS IN SERVICE

(Capt.) "Pete" Jones writes from Washington: "Just as I was on the point of going overseas, I was transferred to the War Dept. where I wrestle with Pentagon offices and see many MLatians in action. I have lunch almost every day with (Lt. Col.) Bowie Millican and (Capt.) Dougald McMillan, and occasionally with (Capt.) Tom Swedenberg, (1st Lieut.) Gale Noyes, and others you would know. Somebody ought to write a dissertation (after the war of

course) on college professors in the war." Pete's address is 2649 Woodley Rd. N. W., Washington, D.C.

(Lieut. sg) Ned McAdam writes that after May 10 he will be at the U.S. Naval Air Station, Cape May, N. J. In enclosing an off-print of his MP article on "Pseudo-Johnsonian," he sadly comments that it is his "latest and last for awhile."

Maury Quinlan, who was in the Language-Area unit at Lehigh Univ., is now in Detachment B, 4th Radio Sq. Mobile, Mac Dill Field, Tampa (8) Florida.

G. P. Winship Jr. writes: "For almost a year and a half I have been a corporal, and a technician corporal at that; a 'T/5' among non-coms is regarded like a Scotsman in Augustan London.

But I have married above my station (and some 3000 miles from it). My wife of two months is Ensign Dale Echols Winship, USNR (wR) -- a Wave in Washington In happier times, at Chapel Hill, her field was the renaissance, but she'll learn plenty about Dr. Johnson when this is all over." Winship's present address is 115th Signal Radio, Intelligence Co., Presidio of San Francisco, Calif.

-oOo-

ANSWERS TO QUIZ

(1) walsh, Essay on Criticism; (2) Dennis (Appius), Essay on Criticism; (3) Martha Blount, Moral Essays, Epistle II; (4) Gay, On Mr Gay, In Westminster Abbey; (5) Gil-don, Epistle to Arbuthnot; (6) Cib-ber (Bays), Dunciad; (7) Allen, Epilogue to the Satires, Dialogue I; (8) Swift, Dunciad; (9) Curl, Dunciad; (10) Addison (Atticus) Epistle to Arbuthnot.

NEW JOHNSON ESSAYS

Bertrand H. Bronson (U. of C.) has just brought out three essays entitled Johnson and Boswell -- published by the Univ. of Calif. Press. In the first essay, "Johnson Ag-on-ists" Bronson insists that Johnson, despite his surface torism, had really a dynamic attitude toward life, and was temperamentally always in revolt. He had, moreover, "the boiling, turbulent imagination of a poet capable of fine frenzy..."

In the second essay, "Boswell's Boswell," the complex, baffling nature of Boswell's personality is discussed, largely from evidence in the Malahide Papers.

"Johnson's Irene" completes the volume. This is an expanded version of Bronson's paper intended for the last M. L. A. meeting, and is a study of the background of the play, and what the piece can tell us about Johnson.

Here is a delightful book, packed with stimulating ideas, and decidedly good reading.

-oOo-

Just as the stencils are being completed, word comes from E. G. Cox that MLQ will include in the Sept. issue an article by Bill Wimsatt, (Yale) on some aspects of rhyme in Pope's poetry. Cox adds that it should be widely read "for it uncovers a subtle artfulness in rhyming that should go a long ways toward correcting the time worn opinion that Pope was careless in his handling of rhyme."

-oOo-

One final query -- Have you seen the review of the new Dunciad in Scrutiny (Winter, 1943)? Hoyt Trowbridge wrote to us about it, and when your editor had trouble finding a copy, Mary K. Woodworth took time to send us a digest. Let us hear what you think of this type of reviewing of scholarly books. We hope to have more to say about the matter in our next issue.